



2023 Annual Update



Founded in 1990, Appleseed Capital is the institutional impact investing group of Pekin Hardy Strauss Inc. We focus on outstanding research and disciplined impact investing strategies.

- Based in Chicago with over \$900 million of AUM as of 12/31/2021
- 2015, became the first investment adviser in Chicago certified as a B Corporation.
- The Fund Investment committee includes seven investment professionals
- The portfolio managers managing the fund have significant personal investments in the fund

### Boutique, value-shop, research-centric culture:

- Investment process focused on bottom-up, fundamental research
- Synergy between Wall Street experience and operating experience
- World view tends to be fairly contrarian
- Team-oriented research process and decision-making

# INVESTMENT OBJECTIVE & PHILOSOPHY

---

---

*We are value investors who seek to generate market-beating returns by making prudent, disciplined, and sustainable investments in markets around the world.*



- Think **independently**.
- Go wherever we find **absolute value**.
- Invest with the **long-term** in mind.
- **Focus** capital on our best ideas.
- **Manage risk** of permanent capital loss.

---

*Micro-, Small-, or Mid-Cap investing involve greater risk not associated with investing in more established companies, such as greater price volatility, business risk, less liquidity and increased competitive threat.*

*Investments in international markets present special risks including currency fluctuation, the potential for diplomatic and political instability, regulatory and liquidity risks, foreign taxation and differences in auditing and other financial standards. Risks of foreign investing are generally intensified for investments in emerging markets.*

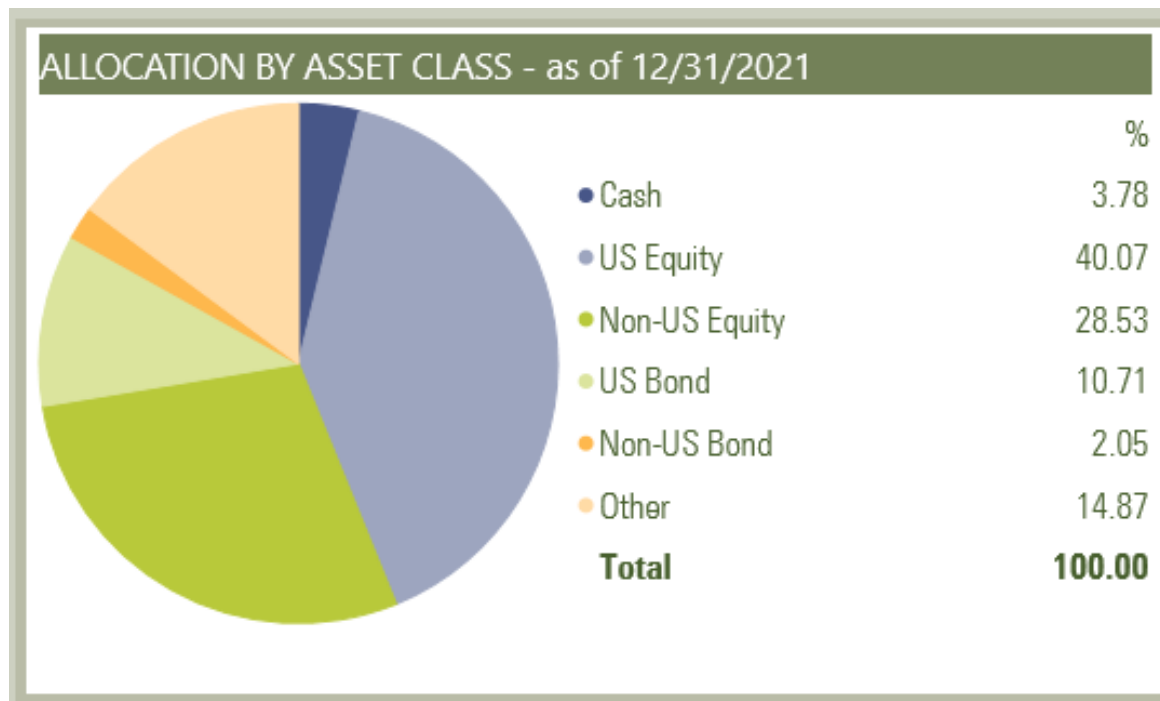
---

---

## ACTIVE MANAGEMENT– 12/31/2021



Many investment managers limit their investment universe in order to be classified as a “small cap US” manager or a “large cap International” manager. At Appleseed, Global Value Investing is identifying deeply undervalued, responsible companies from markets around the world.



## Fundamentals

We consider the overall market environment, but we are ultimately bottom-up rather than top-down investors. We look to purchase stocks with strong, long-term fundamentals that we believe are temporarily out-of-favor among investors.

## Valuation

We focus on the risk side of the investor equation, not just on the potential upside; we purchase companies selling at a substantial discount to our intrinsic value estimate.

## Responsibility

We seek to manage risk by owning high quality companies with principled managers that run their companies in a responsible manner. We evaluate managers, product safety/quality, environmental policies and corporate governance.



**UNIVERSE OF PUBLICLY TRADED SECURITIES**



**INITIAL SCREENS**

Quantitative and Sustainability Screens



**RESEARCH PROCESS**

FUNDAMENTALS	FINANCIAL ANALYSIS	MANAGEMENT	VALUATION
<p>Market trends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyclical vs. secular</li> <li>• Pricing power</li> </ul> <p>Competitive moat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to entry</li> <li>• Patents</li> <li>• Brand strength</li> <li>• Customer concentration</li> </ul>	<p>Balance sheet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Operating Assets</li> <li>• Liquidity</li> <li>• Financial leverage</li> </ul> <p>Income statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revenue model</li> <li>• Operating margins</li> </ul> <p>Free cash flow</p>	<p>Owner-operator mentality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inside ownership</li> <li>• Use of stock options</li> <li>• Returns cash to shareholders</li> </ul> <p>Capital allocation choices</p> <p>Historical performance</p>	<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8-year DCF</li> <li>• Private transactions</li> <li>• Relative valuation</li> <li>• Residual income</li> <li>• Dividend discount</li> <li>• Sum-of-the-parts</li> </ul> <p>50% upside potential, minimal downside risk</p>

## INVESTMENT COMMITTEE SCRUTINY

### ASSUMPTIONS QUESTIONED

- Strength of competitive moat
- Revenue and profit forecast
- Balance sheet strength
- Assumed cost of capital
- Market size & growth potential
- Valuation assumptions
- Downside risk assessment
- Management quality

## PORTFOLIO MANAGER AGREEMENT (3/4 agreement)

## PURCHASE FOR THE PORTFOLIO

## When we purchase a new holding:

- A new equity holding must meet our investment criteria and must offer a sufficient margin of safety represented by the discount between our assessment of intrinsic value and the share price.
  - Collaborative decision making: Three-out-of-Four agreement required among portfolio managers in order to make a new purchase
  - Our position size reflects our view of an investment's risk-return profile

## When we sell an existing holding:

- The stock price of a holding reaches our estimate of intrinsic value
- Our investment thesis or intrinsic value estimate changes
- We believe we have better investment opportunities elsewhere
- Our Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) assessment of a company changes



## Process

- We stress-test our valuation estimates by looking at worst case revenues and deteriorating profit margin scenarios.
- Our analysts monitor each of the portfolio holdings intensively via SEC filings, quarterly conference calls, and meetings with management.
- Our investment committee and analysts constantly challenge the investment thesis assumptions of existing portfolio investments.

Our strategy seeks to minimize potential downside risk through the analysis of material non-financial factors and implementation of both positive and negative ESG screening:

Environmental and sustainability reporting and transparency

Regulatory, litigation and reputational risk

Shareholder interests and brand integrity

Board structure, accountability and executive compensation

Select negative screening

# HOW WE SCREEN FOR RESPONSIBILITY

---

---



## Purpose of our ESG screening process:

- Identify companies that balance the generation of profits with an awareness of their impact on the environment and society

Exclude companies that generate material revenue from:

- Fossil Fuels
- Tobacco Products
- Alcoholic Beverages
- Gambling
- Weapons Systems
- Pornography
- 'Too-Big-to-Fail' Banking

Measure Performance and affirmatively invest based on:

- Environmental Reporting and Disclosure
- Safety
- Litigation and Reputational Risk
- Executive Compensation
- Board Structure and Accountability
- Human Rights Track Record
- Community Impact

Appleseed Fund looks to generate impact in its portfolio by investing in mission driven community banks.

The strategy generally holds between one and two percent of its portfolio in investments which have a direct, positive impact on local communities. We allocate a portion of the strategies capital to CDs in various Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). These CDFIs provide loans to individuals and businesses which are under-served by traditional banks.

A few examples of how investment in community banks creates impact in our portfolio:

- Offering mortgages and small business loans to women, minorities, rural residents and low-wealth families
- Stimulating and supporting small business growth and creating jobs in low income census tracts
- Provide financing to local green businesses
- Serving inner city communities

The Appleseed Fund shareholder advocacy efforts, as initiated by Pekin Hardy Strauss, Inc., encourage boards and management teams to be more transparent and responsible for environment, social and governance (ESG) matters. We believe investors can have significant influence on the companies they own through informal engagement, through proxy voting and through shareholder resolutions.

## Proxy voting

- Pekin Hardy Strauss, Inc., on behalf of the Appleseed Fund, votes proxies in a manner that considers shareholder interests and that encourages boards to govern companies more responsibly. Our votes support management incentives that are aligned with the creation of long-term value for stakeholders, encourage more transparent reporting on companies' sustainability initiatives, and bolster boards' efforts to govern more responsibly.

## Shareholder resolutions

- Filing a formal resolution to ratify or request a specific action be taken by a corporate board is another way to encourage companies to become more sustainable.

## The fund portfolio managers have significant capital invested in Appleseed Fund:

- We like to see managers who are personally invested in the companies we own; we assume Appleseed shareholders expect the same of us.
- We are more careful in our investing decisions because we are investors in the Appleseed Fund ourselves.

## PORTFOLIO CHARACTERISTICS – 12/31/2021

---

---



---

Average Market Cap (\$mm)	\$13.827
Total Long Equity Holdings	26
Fund Size (\$mm)	\$109.8

---

	Symbol	CUSIP	Inception Date
Investor	APPLX	90470K370	12/8/06
Institutional	APPIX	90470K164	1/28/11

---

# INVESTMENT COMMITTEE PORTFOLIO MANAGERS

---

---



## **Adam Strauss, CFA** - *Portfolio Manager*

Co-CEO of the Adviser. Adam also manages other strategies unrelated to the Fund. Prior to joining the Adviser in 2004, Adam worked in several operating roles, as Sr. Vice President of Corporate Development at EquipNet, Inc. (2000-2004) and as VP of Business Development at Frontier Natural Brands (1997-2000). Adam began his career as a management consultant, at Gemini Consulting (1992-1994) and, prior to that, at Andersen Consulting (1991-1992). Adam earned a BA from Stanford University in 1991 and an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business in 1997. He was awarded the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation in 2006.

## **Bill Pekin, CFA** - *Portfolio Manager*

Chairman of the Board of the Adviser. Bill also manages other strategies unrelated to the Fund. Prior to joining the Adviser in 2001, Bill worked in the investment banking division of Credit Suisse First Boston in Chicago. Prior to this position he was an investment banker and high yield/high grade research analyst at Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette in New York. Bill began his career at MetLife Investment Management Corp. in 1993. Bill earned a BA from Haverford College and an MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 2000. He was awarded the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation in 2003.

## **Joshua Strauss, CFA** - *Portfolio Manager*

Co-CEO of the Adviser. Joshua also manages other strategies unrelated to the Fund. Joshua joined the Adviser in 2004 as an Analyst and Portfolio Manager. Previous to joining the Adviser, Josh acted in an operational capacity as Director of Business Development at Color Kinetics Incorporated (2000-2004). He began his career as an Analyst at Shearman & Sterling (1995-1998) and, prior to that, at Markowitz & McNaughton (1994-1995). Joshua earned a B.A. in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia in 1994 and an MBA from the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan in 2000. He was awarded the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation in 2006.

## **Shaun Roach, CFA** - *Portfolio Manager*

Prior to joining the advisor in 2014, Shaun spent five years at Deloitte Financial Advisory Services assisting clients with valuation needs related to financial reporting, tax compliance, and strategic planning. He received a B.S. in Actuarial Science and Finance from the University of Illinois in May 2005 and an MBA from the University of Chicago in 2016.



## **Joseph Plevelich, CFA** - Portfolio Managers

Prior to joining the advisor in 2021, Joseph brings more than 17 years of experience in securities research and analysis having worked on both the buy-side and sell-side, most recently at Boenning & Scattergood. Joseph began his career at Schneider Capital Management in 2004, where he served as Senior Vice President and was responsible for conducting buy-side research in the financial services, real estate, and energy sectors. Joseph has a Bachelor of Science degree in Finance and Management from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

## **Matthew Blume, CFA** - *Director of ESG Research and Shareholder Advocacy*

Matt is the Director of ESG Research and the Manager of Shareholder Advocacy for Appleseed Capital. Prior to Appleseed, Matt was an investment advisor for Cornerstone Asset Management. He earned a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Valparaiso University and is currently enrolled at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

**Alpha** is a risk-adjusted measure of performance that represents the average return on a portfolio over and above that predicted by the capital asset pricing model (CAPM), given the portfolio's beta and the average market return.

**Beta** is a measure of the volatility, or systematic risk, of a portfolio in comparison to the market as a whole. A beta of 1 indicates that the security's price will move with the market. A beta of less than 1 means that the security will be less volatile than the market. A beta of greater than 1 indicates that the security's price will be more volatile than the market.

**Information Ratio** is a ratio of portfolio returns above the returns of a market benchmark to the volatility of those returns.

**Sharpe Ratio** is a ratio used to measure risk-adjusted performance. It is calculated by subtracting the risk-free rate from the rate of return for a portfolio and dividing the result by the standard deviation of the portfolio returns.

**Standard Deviation** is applied to the annual rate of return of an investment portfolio to measure the investment's historical volatility.

**Tracking Error** is the standard deviation percentage difference between the return of a portfolio and the return of a market benchmark.

**Downside Risk** is a statistical measurement of a portfolio's dispersion below the mean return of a benchmark.

**Active Share** is the sum of active position weights as a percentage of the total fund, the degree to which a fund is different from its benchmark.

*Value-based investments are subject to the risk that the broad market may not recognize their intrinsic value. Investments in international markets present special risks such as erratic market conditions, economic and political instability and fluctuation in currency exchange rates; this may be enhanced when investing in emerging markets. Investments in commodities may be affected by overall market movements, changes in interest rates, and other factors such as weather, disease, embargoes and international economic and political developments. Commodities may subject the Fund to greater volatility than investment in traditional securities. Small and mid-cap stocks involve greater risks and they can fluctuate in price more than larger company stocks. Short-selling involves increased risks and transaction costs. You risk paying more for a security than you received from its sale.*

The universe of acceptable investments for the Fund may be limited as compared to other funds due to the Fund's ESG investment screening. Because the Fund does not invest in companies that do not meet its ESG criteria, and the Fund may sell portfolio companies that subsequently violate its screens, the Fund may be riskier than other mutual funds that invest in a broader array of securities. Although the Pekin Hardy believes that the Fund can achieve its investment objective within the parameters of ESG investing, eliminating certain securities as investments may have an adverse effect on the Fund's performance.



Sales Contact: **Matthew Blume** | 312.948.4973 | [matt@appleseedcapital.com](mailto:matt@appleseedcapital.com)

---

Visit us online: [www.appleseedfund.com](http://www.appleseedfund.com)

*For more information on the Appleseed Fund, please call Appleseed at 1-800-470-1029 for a free prospectus. An investor should consider the investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses of an investment carefully before investing. The prospectus contains this and other information. Read it carefully before you invest or send money. Distributed by Ultimus Fund Distributors, LLC. (Member [FINRA](#))*